

Elementary Principles of Syndicalism by Salvador Cayetano Carpio

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The Author

The brochure is ascribed to Salvador Cayetano Carpio, an energetic, dedicated and well-known Communist labor leader of El Salvador, the country for which the pamphlet was prepared. The superior scholarship and skill with which it is written suggest that it might have been prepared originally by one of the good Spanish-language writers; some of whom are exiled members of the Spanish Communist Party who work on propaganda and translations in Prague and Moscow.

Carpio allegedly has received propaganda from Communist centers abroad, including material written by Ilya Ehrenburg, and in 1956-57 was reported as in training in Moscow. He fits well into the category of specially trained and qualified persons placed in positions that fit their background which the Communist Party of El Salvador reportedly sought out and developed as a policy. A member of the Peakers' Union, he was assigned to the syndical organization field in 1949. He was secretary general of the CROS Comite de Reorganizacion Obrera Sindical (Committee for Syndical Labor Reorganization) and was temporarily exiled to Honduras for his activities. He was also a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of El Salvador. He directed the CROS pro-peace campaign. In 1950 he served on two permanent committees of the Confederacion de Obreros de El Salvador, one of which had the task of defending local industry from the encroachment of foreign interests, and one called the "peace committee" which worked to establish amicable relations between Salvadoran workers and worker organizations in other Latin American countries. In 1951 he denounced the Inter-American Commission for Women as an imperialist project to subjugate Latin American women. He was jailed in 1952 but was released in April 1954, after he was found not guilty of authorship of subversive manuscript materials found in his possession. After his release he went to Mexico but later returned to El Salvador. In 1955 he was a member of a group within the Communist Party known as the Comite de Resistencia Popular, which proposed to raise funds for agitation and seditious acts.

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Style and Content

The brochure is written in a simple, direct, informal style. Its story is developed with remarkably skillful flow and sequence, so that it could be used effectively either as a platform speech, for reading aloud section by section, or as a training manual of the catechistic order. It consists of an historical introduction dealing with the main epochs in the progressive organization of society and production, proceeds with the related development of labor syndicalism, defines and criticizes types of labor organization—especially American and British trade unionism—which do not conform to the Communist patterns, then provides a clear statement of the practical steps necessary to protect the national labor interests from foreign imperialism forming labor syndicates and a unitary labor central. A high emotional pitch is reached in the denunciation of trade unionism as the tool of imperialism, which should be very effective if the text were used in a well delivered speech. Then by implication the author says: what should be done about it? How can we meet this menace! And proceeds into the exposition of ways and means of organization, closing with a rousing set of slogans and cheers "for a free, independent and revolutionary labor movement."

As a training manual, the brochure is handily divided into short chapters and paragraphs with topical headings. It makes use of question and answer sequences and the first person plural, giving a sense of intimate and friendly understanding between the party spokesman and the listener or reader.

An illiterate or semi-literate worker could easily understand the story told in this primer of syndicalism. The key definitions and phrases appear to be suitable for memorizing, a quality which would be important in training organizers for a backward area where few members of the working class receive schooling of any kind. In such countries facilities for entertainment and recreation are also scarce, so that the "listening circle" is readily formed and easily entertained with short "lessons" that have a story quality, as does the narrative treatment of this primer material. Because of the dearth of schools for members of the poor working classes and the obvious social and economic advantages which are enjoyed by the members of the privileged classes who have access to educational opportunities, book knowledge is revered, desired, and impressive to many workers. They look with admiration on members of their own group who learn to read and like to gather around a literate friend to hear him read aloud.

This is a form of entertainment, but the taste for serious, even ponderous social subjects among poor workers in backward Latin American countries should not be underestimated. Although ignorant by our standards,

and seemingly childish because of their lack of general knowledge about the modern world outside, they are traditionally and temperamentally serious in outlook. The historical allusions in this text, to the earliest human society to Rome, the discovery of the New World, are neither beyond them nor boring as they have a strong sense of tradition and the importance of history.

Because of their simplicity it might be thought that picture material with little reading matter would appeal to them much more than text. They are not habituated to indoctrination through pictures, however, and they participate in the marked Spanish trait of love of the sound of words. Another factor in their receptivity to material of the type under review is their general exposure in childhood to religious training, even though limited, in the Catholic Church. The catechism method of learning is familiar even though they cannot read, and as a result they have a natural tendency to respect and respond to a dogmatic type of presentation in words.

There also is a convincing attraction, cleverly played upon in this booklet, in references to the trials, sacrifices, needs, hopes and rights of the workers' class to which they belong, and this pamphlet proceeds from that thought, by logical, easy steps to a recipe for what to do in order to win "the conquest of a life of complete liberty and absolute freedom from exploitation."

#### Dedication

The booklet starts off with an emotional dedicatory note in which the author focuses attention on the fact that he writes as a fearless and self-sacrificing champion of ill-treated workers who deserve better things from life than they are receiving under the present organization of society. He denounces and challenges the "exploiting class" and he addresses the dedication to women as well as men in his person-to-person approach.

Translation: I dedicate these pages to the heroic working class of El Salvador.

After publication of the "Syndical Letters" written by other comrades which have taught the method of functioning of the syndicates, I have thought it opportune to offer to the worker comrades, in a brief form giving broad general outlines, the principles of syndicalism which we all should understand.

I know that this work will not please the exploiting class, which will demonstrate its fury in many ways. But that doesn't matter.

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Let them get up on their hind legs, stomp their feet, and chew us to bits, these bestial enemies of the working class who as their highest arguments have nothing better to offer than lies, calumnations, kicks, prisons, torture, and exile.

All [of that] will be taken gladly in the knowledge that on the other side, you, men and women comrades the long for a more worthy existence, will give all your attention to these pages of syndical orientation.

Salvador Cayetano Cepio

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The following translated table of contents shows the scope of the pamphlet, although it runs to only 37 pages with good spacing and adequate margins.

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### Chapter I - Historical Background

The first chapter opens with a short definition which puts all that follows into focus with that context, i.e.: "The Syndicate is a fighting weapon of the working class."

A question follows: "Has the Syndicate existed in all the epochs of human history?"

The answer: "No, the Syndicate has not existed in all epochs."

"In order to understand the Syndicate as an organization which has arisen from the necessities of present-day society, it is necessary to place it in the frame of the historical period in which its existence has been possible, in the frame of a given social form of production."

An outline of "the social forms of production which society has known up to our times" follows:

- 1) The Primitive Community
- 2) Slavery
- 3) Feudalism
- 4) Capitalism
- 5) Socialism ("which is enjoyed by one part of humanity today and toward which the rest of the peoples are rapidly moving").

The Primitive Community is described as an idyllic world at the dawn of human history, in which there were no exploiters, no private property, no government, army, prisons, judges, no social classes, and production and distribution were effected in common. This changed with the rise of pastoral life. "Folitzer, in Elementary Principles of Philosophy" is cited as the source.

In the next section, the appearance of masters and slaves is equated, with the creation of private property and the establishment of the State: "government, army, laws, judges, in order to keep the slaves in submission, who continually rebelled against their masters." The period of slavery carried men on from barbarism into civilization, according to this outline, but the unscrupulous exploitation which Rome carried out against the conquered provinces and the enormous taxation exacted in order to maintain internal order and hold back the barbarian invasions, led to general impoverishment. The great agricultural developments based on slave labor became unprofitable. The slaves then were liberated only to become colonos (tenant farmers) who had to pay enormous tribute in money or crops to the owner of the land.

The next sub-section of Chapter One states that the period of slavery was replaced by a new social form of production called Feudalism, in which society remained divided into classes and the feudal lords, also called latifundistas\* because of their immense land holdings, exploited the labor

\* Significant to Latin American workers as the large landowners are commonly identified in their minds with repressive treatment of the poor classes.

of guilds. In this period the artisans of the cities organised corporations or guilds to defend their trades and prevent competition; eventually the guilds became dominated by the master craftsmen who exploited the journeymen and apprentices under their control. It is next explained that after the discovery of new trade routes and lands, intensification of commerce and increased demand for goods led to the rise of the bourgeois merchants and manufacturers and the development of capitalism; the only way the worker could live under this system was by selling his labor for a wage. This marked the birth of a new class hitherto unknown in human society, namely, the proletariat. Two sources are cited for this section: Poirier—Elementary Principles of Philosophy and Luis Goytis—Principles of Political Economy.

The Capitalist Regime. The theme expressed here repeats the idea that the bourgeois class, after carrying out the industrial revolution and destroying the feudal regime, freeing the serfs and breaking up the guilds, obtained control of all the means of production. The exploited proletariat class was dispossessed of power to do anything but live by selling his labor for a wage. Capitalism thus simplified and sharpened class antagonism. A strong picture follows of the plight of the workers: legally and theoretically the worker has certain rights, among them that of selling his labor to any employer he chooses. But "in the economic aspect, the workers do not possess means of production, they do not possess machines, they do not possess factories, they do not possess raw materials, since all of that is the private property of the bourgeois class. Their work is social, since it is performed in common, but the product of that work (which is the profit) is the private property of the owner of the means of production, which in turn is the private property of the patron."

The repetition of phrases in this paragraph merit attention. They bring out with four repetitions that the workers do not possess and emphasize with three repetitions that that the workers do not possess plus the profit from their labor is the private property of the bourgeois or owner-employer class. It is then shown that the proletariat historically turned to various forms of protective organization such as cofrades (brotherhoods), companies, cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, and caínes de resistencia (defense units), finding in the syndicate the best answer to their needs. "The Syndicate is an important spontaneous expression of the struggle between the labor class and the bourgeoisie." This development could not occur until social conditions produced the proletariat. It is therefore deduced that the syndicate is not the result of caprice or the idealistic desires of one or another "agitator"; its foundation rests in the very essence of the capitalist system of misery and the exploitation of man by man."

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Chapter II - What is the Syndicate?

This chapter deals in the same simple, categorical style with the definition of the labor syndicate and its purpose. The name, it is explained, comes from "Syndic" or "Sindico", referring to a functionary charged with defending the interests of a community, but it now has a new and broader meaning. The Syndicate is an organization of struggle of the workers who have united for the defence of their common interests. These interests are: economic (struggle for better wages, reducing the cost of living, price of food, housing, transport, medicine, etc.); social (healthful conditions of work, protection for women, reduction of hours of work, social security, etc.); political (struggle for the promulgation and application of a Labor Code legalizing the workers' conquests, struggle for effective democracy, struggle for peace and for the liberation of the country from the great foreign interests)."

In a similar fashion the meaning of "class instinct" and "class feeling" is defined. Class feeling (or awareness of class) means for the workers to understand that all who are exploited must unite, not only to defend themselves from exploitation but also in order to abolish exploitation, to win a social form of production in which there will no longer be exploiters and exploited and no class struggle. The proper channel for expression of this level of "class feeling" is a political party of the working class, which is the only party that can lead the working class with certainty to the conquest of a life of complete liberty and absolute absence of exploitation. Hence, it is concluded, the workers must fight against any inconsequential syndical tendencies which merely seek to lower the level of class feeling of the proletariat.

This leads logically to discussion of 1) reformist or anti-revolutionary syndicalism, 2) anarcho-syndicalism, and 3) revolutionary syndicalism. Reformist syndicalism means "the yellow syndicates". Among its various, opportunist expressions are "officialized syndicalism," Christian-social syndicalism, and trade unionism. Disregarding reference is made to the corporative system of Portugal, the vertical syndicates in Spain, and the Peronist labor organization, as well as to the Catholic trade unions inspired by the Papal Encyclical "Rerum Novarum."

Trade unionism comes in for the strongest attack as "a tragic disorientation for the working class. . . . Trade unionism practices the struggle against the owner class by limiting it strictly to the economic field and letting the political field remain under the direction of the interests of the capitalists.

In the international field, trade unionism is the unconditional defender of the interests of the great monopolies. Trade unionism was firmly established in England and from there extended to other countries. The syndical movement in the United States is predominantly trade unionist.

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"In countries where the proletariat has a high level of revolutionary feeling trade unionism disguises itself as 'Socialism' in order to mislead the workers. Behind this masquerade it preaches the necessity of change in the structure of capitalist society, but asserts that these changes must be achieved through progressive reform which eventually will lead to the disappearance of exploitation.

". . . trade unionism defends the interests of the great monopolistic enterprises. In the great industrial countries the trade unionist workers fight together with the imperialists of their respective countries to subjugate and exploit the workers of the colonial and dependent countries; because, with the fabulous profits made by the powerful imperialist companies in oil, minerals, rubber, bananas, coffee, electric power, etc., they can provide relative well-being for a small top layer of workers of those countries at the cost of the hunger and misery suffered by the workers of the backward countries.

"Therefore, within the proletariat of those imperialist countries, there is formed a top layer of workers who live relatively well, those who make up the lieutenants or overseers of the imperialists within the syndical movement, and who drag the proletariat toward the trade unionist movement. Such, at present, is the position of the enriched directors of the great North American labor centrale: the AFL and the CIO, and also of the Labor Party leaders of England and of the 'Socialists' of France, Western Germany, Belgium, etc. For this reason we see many North American syndical leaders condoning and serving the iniquitous exploitation which is carried out by the great companies (banana, mining, sugar, etc.) in our countries; we see them defending the policy of the North American government of dominating the backward peoples and we see them supporting in body and soul the war preparations which only benefit the powerful arm manufacturers. To those leaders the death of millions of workers and campesinos means nothing, they have no interest in the mourning and the misery which would fall on the homes of the proletariat, they have no interest in the widows, nor the orphans nor the disabled, nor the destruction and desolation which another war unavoidably would bring upon the fields, towns and cities. They are interested in nothing except the crumbs that fall to them from the table of their imperialist masters, which permit them to enjoy the 'American way of life' that is built up by the sweat, the misery and the semi-feudal backwardness of our colonial, semi-colonial and dependent peoples.

"For the same reasons we see the British Labor party supporting the aggressive policy of the great monopolies in Iran, Burma, Egypt, Hong Kong, Belize [British Honduras], etc. We see the French 'Socialists' condoning the sending of troops to Indochina in order to subjugate a people who wish to be independent, we see them supporting a rapacious policy in North Africa, Madagascar, etc., and we see all of them together defending the plans of the

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great International Cartels such as the monstrous international super-monopoly created by the 'Schuman Plan', the deflated 'Marshall Plan,' the North Atlantic Treaty, the rearmament of Japan and Germany. In all of this, they do nothing more than to protect the interests of financial capital against the vital interests of the working class which they hypocritically pretend to 'defend.'

"Also in the backward countries, the trade unionists succeed in penetrating the syndical movement, with the support, generally, of the governments that have sold themselves out to imperialism, as in the case of the gangsters in the CTC of Cuba and the traitors of the Chilean labor movement. These are traitors in superlative degree, because they turn their backs on the interests of their own class and their country, they fight to maintain the backward condition of our countries, condoning the delivery of our fundamental sources of wealth into the hands of the foreign enterprises which impoverish and exhaust our resources.

"These imperialist overseers, when they have succeeded in getting control of the syndicates, and even before, carry out, with the aid of the police, an implacable persecution against the thinking and patriotic workers who strive for national independence, industrialization and the progress which they never can conquer except through national liberation from the imperialist chains."

#### Conclusion

After this high point of attack, and strong oratorical effect, the remainder of the pamphlet deals with the practical details of syndical organization. It ends with advocacy of national federation and the creation of a single central labor organization. There is no mention whatever of the CPAL or the WFTU or the Communist Party of Moscow. The lesson is confined to the injustices, needs, and hopes of the workers within the national scene and based on a strong warning against the disorienting influence of the North American trade unionists. The last page of the pamphlet contains a series of slogans:

All workers! Fight for unitary syndical central; for the great confederation of workers of El Salvador!

All to the fight for a free, independent and revolutionary syndical movement!

All to the fight for a lasting peace!

All to the fight for the liberation of the nation from the clutches of foreign economic oppression!

For a free and happy country!